

FOLSOM, PA—With extraordinary challenges facing Veterans, military personnel, and their families, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) brought together 50 organizations and leading local and national Veterans leaders for his third 7th Congressional District Veterans Summit, “2009, The Year of the Military Family.” A crowd of more than 500 Veterans, Service Members, and military family members and their friends attended the event on May 11, 2009, at Ridley High School in Folsom, Pa. The evening featured discussions lead by Congressman Sestak, Department of Veterans Affairs Chief of Staff John Gingrich, and Rear Admiral T. McCreary, president of Military.com, along with exhibitions from 50 Veterans organizations. Read what others are saying:

**A Model for Others to Emulate:**

<http://www.veteranstoday.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=6581>

**Sestak Hosts Third Veterans Summit:**

<http://thepennsylvaniaprogressive.com/diary/1389/sestak-hosts-third-veterans-summit>

**More than 600 attend Veterans Summit:**

[http://www.newsofdelawarecounty.com/WebApp/appmanager/JRC/SingleWeekly;!573812432?\\_nfpb=true&\\_pageLabel=pg\\_wk\\_article&r21.pgpath=%2FNDNC%2FHome&r21.content=%2FNDNC%2FHome%2FTopStoryList\\_Story\\_2740057](http://www.newsofdelawarecounty.com/WebApp/appmanager/JRC/SingleWeekly;!573812432?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=pg_wk_article&r21.pgpath=%2FNDNC%2FHome&r21.content=%2FNDNC%2FHome%2FTopStoryList_Story_2740057)

**Veterans Come Together for Annual Summit:**

<http://delcotimes.com/articles/2009/05/13/news/doc4a0a3426bf3bf884264612.txt>

“I firmly believe that when a Veteran is hurting, a family is hurting. And, that the reverse is true—when a Veteran is secure, a family is secure. In these challenging economic times that notion is especially relevant,” said Congressman Sestak. “We know that the severe recession our nation experienced in 1974 did much to complicate the return of so many of our Vietnam War Veterans. Unfortunately those young men and women came home not only to a struggling economy; they also received a lesser GI Bill than their fathers and had to navigate VA Medical Centers (VAMCs) unprepared to deal with the unique nature of that war and the changes to our society since the 1940s. We owe this Nation’s service men and women not just a debt of gratitude, but of support. That’s why we are here this evening, to ensure that Veterans of all eras, and their families, get the care and support they have earned and deserve.

"Our Pennsylvania Army National Guard 56th Stryker Brigade is scheduled to return home in the fall from their largest deployment since WWII. When they left their jobs for the long preparations for that deployment, ours was a very different economy," the Congressman continued. "They will come home to historically high rates of unemployment and an economy struggling to recover from a much more severe crisis than the 70's. As such, the time to prepare for their return is now. It is my mission to see family members of Veterans past, present and future come together in support of themselves and one another."

Congressman Sestak supported provisions in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to specifically assist those who have served our country, such as incentives to hire unemployed veterans. Under current law, businesses are allowed to claim a work opportunity tax credit equal to 40 percent of the first \$6,000 of wages paid to employees of one of nine targeted groups. The bill would add unemployed Veterans as a new targeted group. An individual would qualify if he/she was discharged or released from active duty from the Armed Forces during 2008, 2009 or 2010 and received unemployment compensation for more than four weeks during the year before being hired. In addition, the bill adds \$1.4 billion in additional funding to modernize our VA hospitals and \$2.98 billion to modernize Department of Defense hospitals, barracks and day care centers.

Among the organizations in attendance were: Philadelphia, Coatesville, and Wilmington VAMCs; Philadelphia Regional Office and Insurance Center; VA Education Center; RecruitMilitary.com; Widener University Veterans Law Clinic; Delaware Valley Industrial Resource Center; Social Security Administration; Disabled American Veterans (DAV); Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW); Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA); Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA); Pennsylvania Institute of Technology; The Collegiate Consortium; and many, more. Local and national leaders and decision-makers including State Representative Bryan Lentz of the House Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee and State Senator Andy Dinniman of Senate House Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee were also in attendance.

"There are more than 54,000 Veterans in the 7th Congressional District and more than 15 million nationwide. I am determined to see that each is aware of the benefits to which he or she is entitled and uses every one of them to full effect," the Congressman said. "Even today my office works with World War II and Korean War Veterans who fought in combat, but for a variety of reasons never enrolled in the VA Medical system following their service. Tragically, due to policy decisions of 2003 – while our nation was at war no less – hundreds of thousands of lower-income veterans were locked out of care they need and deserve. Their wives and children are invariably shocked that our government was so callous. And when that shock passes, they

face the shared, multi-generational challenge of finding and paying for, the expensive care their loved one needs. Following our 2008 Veteran Summit, Chairman Filner and I worked to find \$375 million to enroll some of these 'Priority 8' lower-income Veterans in the VA medical system – but more must be done.

“Especially today, with health care costs such a burden and unemployment or underemployment eroding the stability of many families, the security of Veterans benefits is more important than ever. Beyond health care, competition for employment will be fierce for our returning Guardsmen and women. I want them, and their families, to understand how the 21st Century GI Bill, with its uniquely transferable benefits, can help them compete for and win jobs.”

According to a survey released last week, 94 percent of military family members believed that people without close ties to the military “do not understand or appreciate the sacrifices made by service members and their families.” The survey was put out by Blue Star Families, the American Red Cross, the USO, National Military Family Association, Armed Forces YMCA, Military.com and Military Spouse Magazine.

“The question needs to be asked, what specifically are we doing for military members and veterans, and their families, all of whom bear such an enormous burden to ensure our national security?” said Congressman Sestak. “This event, first and foremost, is about helping those who have made this sacrifice by connecting them with the people and organizations that can provide them the healthcare, education, business assistance, and other benefits they have earned.

“Second, this event is about raising awareness of the many challenges facing military members and Veterans -- our national treasure -- as our VA system faces numerous challenges.

“Finally, this event is about accountability for our elected representatives, including myself, as well as the people charged with giving Vets and their families the benefits they deserve. That is why it is so important to me to have Mr. Gingrich, the heads of the VA Medical Centers in our region, and others here, so the Vets in my District can hear directly from them and communicate directly with them. I have the upmost confidence in new VA Secretary Eric Shinseki, Mr. Gingrich and their team to provide the leadership that is necessary, partly because they understand, from their exceptional service in the Army, that leaders must be held accountable for their performance.”

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group*

*of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.*

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